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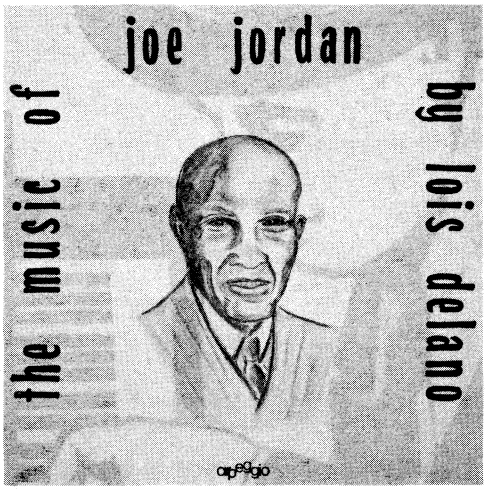

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THE RAGTIME SOCIETY P. O. BOX 520 WESTON ONTARIO CANADA

THOSE RAGTIME YEARS 1904

by JACK CUFF

This year marked an important turning point in the public acceptance of classic Ragtime. It had been the popularity of ragtime music in the sporting houses of the "tenderloin" districts of St. Louis, New Orleans, Chicago and many other communities that had kept the 'sinful sounds' from the front parlors and drawing rooms of respectable society. The impact of ragtime on world travellers and tourist visitors to the St. Louis World's Fair was to have a lasting effect.

The official name for the 1904 Fair at St. Louis was the "Louisiana Purchase Exposition". It was a dazzling spectacle and made considerable use of "electric light bulbs". A formal water display layout featured fountains and a cascading course for the water flow. The fair was honoured and advertised musically. The permanent exhibition halls completed this wonder of its day.

The greatest commercial contribution to the World's Fair musically was a song success written by Andrew B. Sterling to the music of the great cakewalk composer Kerry Mills called "Meet Me In St. Louis, Louis". The previous year in anticipation of the Fair, Tom Turpin composed his classic "St. Louis Rag". Scott Joplin was an active composer during the year of the Fair. For that reason he composed a descriptive rag in classic form called 'The Cascades". In addition his "Chrysanthemum Rag" was published by John Stark of St. Louis. "The Favourite Rag" was published by A. W. Perry Co. of Sedalia, and "The Sycamore Rag" by Will Rossiter of Chicago. A late finisher was 'The St. Louis Tickle" by Barney and Seymore.

A then unknown James Scott at age 18, was one of two important composers from Carthage, Missouri, the other being Clarence Woods. Scott wrote "On The Pike March" in honour of the St. Louis Fair. The number was published by the Dumas Music Store in Carthage where Scott had employment. It made little or no impression on the musical world.

The sound of ragtime was heard by all who visited the World Fair this year and more was heard by those who strayed to the sporting district of St. Louis. Arthur Marshall played classic ragtime at the Spanish Cafe in the Fair Grounds. Tom Turpin held forth at his Rosebud Cafe at 2200 Market Street. John Philip Sousa's band of 64 musicians was regularly featuring 'Cakewalk" compositions during his engagement at the Fair. The National Ragtime Contest was held at St. Louis in conjunction with the World's Fair. Louis Chauvin was to be found playing ragtime in a beer hall located on the grounds.

The National Ragtime Contest was won by a New Orleans pianist named Alfred W. Wilson. Second place was taken by Charlie Warfield of Tennessee. The latter was more famous in later years as the composer of 'I Ain't Got Nobody' and 'Baby Won't You Please Come Home'. It was said that Jelly Roll Morton, also of New Orleans became angrily upset when he heard that Wilson had won the contest. His contempt for Wilson as a ragtime pianist was no less extreme than his unusual modesty in showing his respect for Tony Jackson. Because Morton understood, incorrectly, that Jackson would participate in the contest, he had refrained from entering in protection of his own pride and reputation.

Elsewhere too, an air of respectability was beginning to blow in favour of ragtime. Ragtime could be heard at the travelling minstrel shows, in Vaudeville theatres, at picnic parks, on passenger riverboats, at the circus, at band concerts and wherever the new nickleodeon craze was to be found.

But ragtime held no interest this year for the people of mother Russia. Disputes between Russia and Japan led to the formal declaration of war by the governments of both countries. The Russo-Japanese war began in February. Tsar Nicholas II celebrated the birth of his heir the Tzarevitch Alexis later in August. It was a summer of unrest in Russia. The ominous signs of revolution which was to come in the next year were already apparent. The war was going badly, industry was in a state of depression, and crop failure was becoming a widespread fear in Russia,

The song of the year in British Music halls was "Stop Yer Tickling, Jock!" King Edward VII of Britain visited his German Cousin Kaiser William II in a June meeting at Kiel. There is friendly accord between these countries.

The treaty between the United States and Panama providing for the creation of the Panama Canal was ratified this year following revolt in Panama and separation from Colombia. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th president of the United States, was re-elected for a second term.

In New York City big things were happening. The tallest building in the world was opened - 22 floors and 280 feet high - and because of its shape became known as the 'Flat Iron' building. The New York City Subway was opened to the public and the year saw completion of the Williamsburg bridge across the East River. Collapse of the market for speculative securities in the previous year made this a depression year for the rich with the press labelling the happening a "Millionaires Panic".

It was nevertheless a bright year for the New York Stage. Young George M. Cohan of the "Four Cohans" appeared in his "Little Johnny Jones," a show produced by Sam H. Harris. Cohan was the book author, wrote the song lyrics, composed the music and was the star actor, singer, dancer and stage director. He was a young man in a hurry. A hit tune of the show was "Give My Regards to Broadway".

On May 21st this year a baby boy was born in New York City who is destined to carry the eastern "Stride" style of ragtime piano up to the peak of its artistry and popularity before he reaches the end of his shortened lifetime. His parents named him Thomas Waller, but the world will name him "Fats".

Victor Herbert made his annual mark by the end of the year with his musical "It Happened in Nordland". Eddie Foy is the star of a long run musical called "Piff! Paff! Pouf!"

The death this year of Daniel Decatur Emmett at the age of 89 in Ohio ended the career of a man who was a founder in 1843, during his early years of the ever popular minstrel show format of this day and of many years to come. His name will live on as the composer of "Old Dan Tucker" and "Dixie".

It was a "goodbye" year in another sense. Will Cobb and Gus Edwards had a 1904 success named "Goodbye Little Girl". Joe Howard gave us "Goodbye, My Lady Love". George M. Cohan wrote his song "Goodbye, Flo" for his show of the year. "Teasing", by Cecil Mack and Albert Von Tilzer was the top "pop" song of the year.

In the field of ragtime songs there are two of outstanding merit. The first is titled "The Preacher and the Bear" by Joe Arzonia. Because no one of that name is to be found it is believed the words and music are actually the work of the publisher Arthur Longbrake. The second song is "Alexander, Don't You Love Your Baby No More" by the team of Andrew B. Sterling and Harry Von Tilzer.

In addition to classic rags relating to the World's Fair at St. Louis already mentioned, there were many other ragtime compositions for piano published during the year. Joe Jordan climbing to his prime came out with "Pekin Rag" Tom Turpin had yet another success in "Buffalo Rag". "Carbarlick Acid Rag" by Clarence C. Wiley is a popular one. There is "Red Devil Rag" by Lucien Denni, "Swanee Rag" by Phil Kussel, "Crazy Chord Rag" by Albert Carroll which became a favourite of Jelly Roll Morton. There are many others, like "Funny Folks Rag" by W. C. Powell, "Havana Rag" by Maurice Kerwin, "Buff Rag" by Robert Bircher and "One O'Them Things Rag" by James Chapman and Le Roy Smith to name but a few.

And so it was in this Ragtime Year of 1904 that Classic Ragtime came out of its Sedalia and St. Louis haunts into the hearts of a now ready world.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Due to the depletion of our stock, back issues of the Newsletter will, for the present, no longer be available for sale.

RECORD REVIEW

by TEX WYNDHAM

Exclusive 501 (stereo or mono) 'Grand Piano", piano duets by Willie 'The Lion' Smith and Don Ewell

Selections: I've Found A New Baby; A Porter's Love Song (To A Chambermaid:; I Would Do Anything For You; Some Of These Days; Just You, Just Me; Everybody Loves My Baby; Can't We Be Friends?; You Took Advantage Of Me; Keepin' Out Of Mischief Now; Sweet Georgia Brown.

Of all the pianists to come on the scene since the traditional jazz revival in the early 1940's, one of the best -- and surely the most versatile -- is Don Ewell. His latest LP finds him playing first-class Harlem ; 'rent-party' piano in a series of swinging, enjoyable duets with one of the founders of the Harlem piano school, Willie 'The Lion' Smith. And it takes nothing at all away from The Lion, who can still play with the flashy execution, driving ryhthm, lilting melody and arresting showmanship required of the best Harlem pianists, to say that Ewewll not only holds his own in fast compa ny, but also contributes a lot of fine piano playing to the proceedings.

Ewell has played and recorded with traditional jazzmen of virtually every school, from the primitive New Orleans style of George Lewis to the modernized New York dixieland of the later Jack Teagarden groups. Between those extremes, he appears on LP as part of the crisp, two-beat San-Francisco-styled band of Turk Murphy, the smooth New-Orleans-styled band of Kid Ory, and the Chicago-styled band that used to play nightly at Chicago's Jazz Ltd. night club. And as if that wasn't enough, he has recorded as accompanist to primitive blues singer Mama Yancey and to traditional jazz vocalist Claire Austin.

If such a variety makes it sound as if Ewell has no musical personality of his own, let me hasten to assure you that Ewell remains his own man at all times, making an original, tasteful, creative and swinging contribution wherever he appears. Without exception, Ewell makes his presence known without either hogging the spotlight or changing the nature of the music being played, and the band he's recorded with have always been improved by his presence.

Ewell has also appeared as the principal artist on several LPs which either consist of piano solos or are designed to feature his piano playing. Although none of these are strictly ragtime LPs, many contain individual performances of tunes by such famous ragtimers as Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, and James P. Johnson. Moreover, the work of any traditional pianist who has so thoroughly mastered the spectrum of traditional styles is obviously of interest to ragtimers. Among the LPs which spotlight Ewell's piano playing are the following;

Audiophile AP-66, 'Yellow Dog Blues', by Don Ewell piano; Nappy Trottier, trumpet; Marty Grosz, guitar; Earl Murphy, bass. Michigan Water Blues; Atlanta Blues; Tishomingo Blues; Georgia Bo Bo; New Orleans Hop Scop Blues; Blues My Naughty Sweetie Gives To Me; Ole Miss; Yellow Dog Blues.

Center CLP-3, 'Don Ewell Trio And Quartet', by Don Ewell, piano; George Lewis, clarinet; 'Cie' Frazier, drums; Jim Robinson, trombone (selections marked *).

Red Sails In The Sunset; When My Dreamboat Comes Home; I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now; Stumblin'; Harvest Moon; Baby Face*; Georgia Camp Meeting* (2 separate takes); Pretty Baby*; Salty Dog*.

Three LPs on the Good Time Jazz label, all by Don Ewell, piano (solo on selections marked *); Darnell Howard, clarinet; Minor Hall, drums; Pops Foster, bass (appears only on M-12043 and M-12046) :

L-12021, 'Music To Listen To Don Ewell By'
South Side Strut; I Can't Belive That You're In Love With Me*; A Monday Date; Love Me Or Leave Me; Squeeze Me*; Bush Street Scramble; Old Fashioned Love; Blues Improvisation*; Parlor Social; You Took Advantage Of Me*; Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good To You; My Honey's Lovin Arms.

M-12043, 'Man Here Plays Fine Piano' Everybody Loves My Baby; Blue Turning Grey Over You*; Am I Blue?; Frisco Rider*; You're Driving Me Crazy; Green Swamp; I Want A Little Girl*; My Home Is In A Southern Town; Save It Pretty Mama*; Keepin' Out Of Mischief Now.

M-12046, 'Free'n Easy'
Wolverine Blues; Ain't Misbehavin'*; If I Could Be With You; Lulu's Back In Town;*, Just You, Just Me*; Blue Turning Grey Over You; Blues My Naughty Sweetie Gives To Me*; Delmar Drag; Chicago Breakdown*; All The Wrongs You've Done To Me*; What's The Use.

Windin' Ball 101 (10" LP), ' Don Ewell , Pianist.
South Side Strut; Spanish Singe; Delmar Drag; Mabel's Dream Atlanta Blues; Melancholy Stomp; Beale Street Blues; WillieThe Weeper.

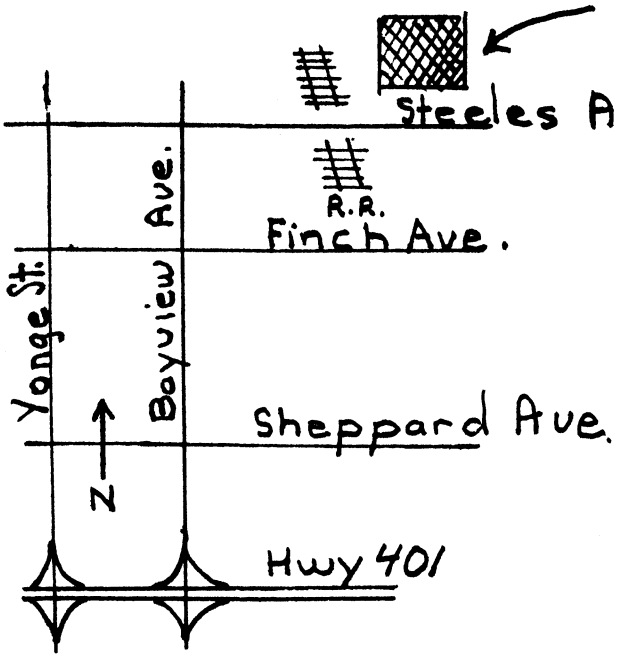
Windin' Ball 103, 'Don Ewell - Piano Solos of King Oliver Creole Jazz Band Tunes'
Buddy's Habit; Working Man Blues; Froggy Moore; Sweet Baby Doll, Ain't Gonna Tell Nobody; Snake Rag; Weather Bird Rag; Where Did You Stay Last Night?; Just Gone; Mandy Lee Blues; Jazzin' Babies Blues; New Orleans Stomp.

In addition to his current LP with The Lion, ragtimers will probably find the two Windin' Ball LPs of most interest. In particular, the LP of Oliver tunes is played in a tight, gutty, straightforward style that has much in common with ragtime, and many of the multistrain Oliver numbers are similar in structure in some ways to rags. The other Windin' Ball LP contains four Ewell compositions and demonstrates his own ability to construct inventive multi-strain piano solos. The Windin' Balls, by the way, are among Ewell's earliest LPs, and comparing them with his new records will make it clear that Ewell's style has continued to evolve and develop over the years, though remaining firmly in the traditional idiom throughout.

Windin' Ball is not the easiest label to find these days, and it is worth mentioning that, even though the other recordings listed above tend to fall pretty much on the jazz side of the jazz-ragtime border, they all contain much excellent piano work that would probably be enjoyed by most ragtime fans. In any event, the new duet LP is a delight throughout, and would be enjoyed by anyone who likes the New York ragtime style.

If not much has been said in this review about the other half of this LP -- the work of Willie 'The Lion' Smith --, it is not because any slight is intended to this excellent and unique musician. The second part of this review, to be published in the next issue of The Ragtimer, will be devoted entirely to The Lion, and will contain some remarks on some other LPs that feature his playing. However, as an advance word, that article will contain nothing to suggest that you should not go out right now and order a copy of 'Grand Piano', by Don Ewell and Willie 'The Lion' Smith.

W. C. HANDY



Announcing: The Annual Ragtime Society 'Bash'

NOVEMBER 1st -- 1969

On SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1st between 4:00 p. m. and 1:00 a. m. the RAGTIME SOCIETY is hosting its yearly "BASH" at the BAYVIEW GOLF and COUNTRY CLUB in Toronto.

The Bayview Golf and Country Club is located on Steeles Avenue about one mile east of Bayview Avenue (north side). This year our party will be held in a modern setting that is conducive to musical entertainment. Full facilities are being provided including an appetizing hot buffet and a complete bar service.

Because of the special catering being provided, it is necessary that we know in advance how many are going to attend. Please make use of the coupon below and return it to us before October 1st. Price is $6. 00 per person.

Many ragtime notables are expected to be in attendance. Our guest of honour will be the fine pianist-composer , EUBIE BLAKE.

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!!!!

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
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